

A photograph of two women sitting on a light-colored couch with a colorful, patterned throw pillow. The woman on the left is Black with a large afro hairstyle, wearing a yellow top with a colorful geometric pattern on the shoulder and grey pants. The woman on the right is Asian with long dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved top and blue jeans. They are both looking at a laptop screen held by the woman on the right. The background is a bright window with a view of a city building.

the adopted life

DISCUSSION GUIDE

EPISODE 1 - WASHINGTON D.C.

CREATED BY BETH WHEELER, MSW

DISCUSSION
GUIDE
AUTHOR

Beth Wheeler, MSW, is a white, lesbian identified woman parenting her two domestically adopted African American boys with her wife of 19 years. They live in Maryland and their boys are nearly 10 and 7. Beth is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who works with individuals, families, groups and organizations wanting to build capacity to learn, support, lead and act on behalf of equity, inclusion, human rights and social justice. Her areas of specialty are trauma, and the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality, gender, gender identity, ability, ethnicity, adoption and culture.

FACILITATORS

I am thrilled you want to facilitate a conversation about transracial adoption sparked by seeing Episode 1 of The Adopted Life.

This discussion guide is to serve as a template for conversation among those who are both new and more seasoned to the world of adoption.

As facilitators, your job is to create a space in which there is room for all voices to be heard, no matter the size of the group and who is in it. Be aware of who is in the group—who makes up “the majority” and the “minority”—i.e. adoptive parents, adoptees, first/birth families, etc. Encourage the group to be conscious of “air time” and implications of who speaks and who doesn’t. Facilitators must decide the format for discussion depending on the group.

Ideally, there would be dyads, small group and large group, and potentially affinity group discussion. Set guidelines for engagement before starting group. Include definitions of themes/ essential terms or brainstorm them.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Write down your initial reactions/thoughts/feelings to the episode. Share.
2. Introduce yourself and your role within the adoption constellation (Adoptee, First/Birth parent, Adoptive parent, sibling), or as professional, friend, ally.
3. Was there one particular person's story in the episode that you were drawn to the most? Why?
4. Which participant or question asked during the episode impacted you? Explore.

BIRTH PRIVILEGE

1. Brainstorm examples of birth privilege. Discuss the impact for those who have it and those who don't.
2. What are examples of privileges that biological children have growing up with their biological families?
3. Name 1-3 changes in language that could create more overtly welcoming spaces for anyone in the constellation relating to examples discussed in question 2.
4. Brainstorm strategic and teachable responses to micro-aggressions in relation to birth privilege.

ADOPTION/RACIAL IDENTITY

1. Are adoption and/or race part of your identity? How do you identify? Name the identifying features of your immediate family (race, adoption, gender, sexuality, etc.).
2. In your immediate or extended family do you talk about adoption and/or race? If so, is one discussed more than another? If not, are there other areas you talk about adoption and/or race?
3. If there have not been conversations about adoption and/or race in your family and/or life for whatever reason, and you are now in a professional or relational role with transracial adoption, how do you begin a conversation about them when it is not a conversation you are used to having?
4. Do you talk about adoption and/or race with your friends. If so, who brings it up? If not, do you want to? If you want to, what are 1-2 things you would want to talk about?
5. Identity development is a lifelong process. Where would you say you are in your own identity development? (Race, Adoption, Gender, Sexual, Class, etc)

NARRATIVE

1. What is a narrative? Who creates the it?
2. What is "narrative burden?"- who experiences it in the episode?
3. What is your narrative around your role in or with the adoption constellation?
4. Whether you are an adoption professional, ally, friend, or a viewer of TV shows on adoption, you have perceptions about adoption. Name 3 things about your perceptions of adoption that might contribute to your participation in the narrative burden.
5. What parts of your adoption narrative are facts/hearsay/imagination?

FIRST / BIRTH FAMILY

1. Name 3 feelings/thoughts you had about any of the stories in the episode related to birth stories and/or birth family.
2. In your families/friendships/ classrooms- do you ever talk about First/Birth families? If so, who initiates it? If not, what do you think that is about?
3. How would you feel if you came across First/Birth family information that you were uncomfortable with? What would you do?
4. For adoptive parents with a children in a closed adoption - What are your immediate thoughts and feelings that come to you if your child states they'd like to search? Would you help them?

SEARCHING

1. What does searching refer to in the episode?
2. Given what you saw in the episode, how do you now understand when searching begins for the young adoptee?
3. How can adoptive parents support the adoptee during their searching?
4. How can adoptive professionals support adoptive parents and families who are searching?

CODE SWITCHING

1. What is code switching?
2. What are examples of code switching for Transracial Adoptees?
3. Name 1-3 things people might feel about code switching?
4. Why do you think people code switch?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. Name 1-3 things you learned from this episode.
2. Name 1-3 things you may do differently now that you have seen this episode.
3. Would you pass this episode along to others?
If yes, will you? If no, why?